



Week 5: Reflection

Reflection

Throughout this course we have discussed a number of legal issues facing today's public-school educators. For your final assignment, you will select three legal issues that you feel will be most relevant to you as a school administrator. One of these issues will focus on student management; a second on personnel management. The third can relate to any topic we've covered in the course. By giving your responses to the questions that follow, you will 1) record what you have learned in this course, 2) reflect on its significance in your professional life, and 3) develop a plan to further increase your knowledge and skills.

Follow These Steps

1. Reflect upon what you have learned about law and public education.
2. Use the guiding questions in each section to stimulate your thinking as you write three 150-word essays. The questions are meant to guide you, but you may not necessarily provide specific answers to all of them.
3. Write reflectively instead of in "question and answer" style, and feel free to add any related thoughts that go beyond the scope of the writing guidelines.
4. Use formal writing style and cite Essential Readings and court decisions that support your ideas.
5. Submit your three completed essays by the end of Week 5.

Rubric

Use this rubric to guide your work.

Week 5: Reflection	Accomplished	Proficient	Needs Improvement	Unacceptable
Reflection	Completes all 3 essays of the reflection assignment using the minimum 150-words requirement (8 points)	Completes 2 essays of the reflection assignment (5 points)	Completes 1 essay of the reflection assignment (3 points)	Did not submit reflection assignment (0 points)
Mechanics	No mechanical writing errors (2 points)	One to four mechanical writing errors (1 point)		More than five mechanical writing errors (0 points)

Essay 1: Student Management

Respond to the questions in the red box. Your essay should:

- Use citations from the research when applicable.
- Use professional writing protocols.
- Use professional language.

- Which of the student-management issues discussed in this course is most relevant to you as a school administrator?
- How have your views changed about the proper policies and procedures to employ regarding student management?
- How will the knowledge gained on this topic help you become an effective school leader?
- How will it help your staff and your students?

Type your essay in the space below.

The student-management issue discussed in this course that is most relevant to me as a school administrator is the issue of student expression. As the Director of Technology, I help create and enforce policies such as the Student Acceptable Use Policy (AUP), Student Web Publishing Policy (WPP) as well as collaborating in the creation of the Student Code of Conduct (SCC), all of which govern and guide student expression through technology.

Student expression through technology was less of a concern years ago when students were primarily consumers of information; other than dealing with the occasional inappropriate use of email or using our network to access or convey prohibited information such as illegal music downloads, there was little "expression" going on. Now, however, as students create and update school-sponsored weblogs (blogs) and wikis, as well as accessing sites like FaceBook, YouTube and MySpace, there is plenty of opportunity for student speech to be presented in ways which may violate school policies, or conversely, there may be a tendency for school policies to unfairly restrict student speech. My views have changed regarding this part of student management as I now realize students do have a right to express themselves, whereas I have previously known educators who told me that students basically leave all their expression rights at the school door.

The knowledge I gained on this topic will help me become a more effective school leader as I will be able to cite case law such as *Tinker v. Des Moines* when I defend against student policy provisions that are too restrictive on student speech, clarifying that the students have a right to free speech as long as the speech does not materially or substantially disrupt school or interfere with the rights of others. I also have a better understanding of how the publishing of student created works on school-sponsored wikis and blogs can be censored if needed based on *Hazelwood v. Kuhlmeier*, in that a school can censor the content of a school-sponsored publication if the publication is not an open forum. I can clarify to students and their parents, with case law to back me up, that schools are not required to support speech that creates legitimate pedagogical concern. This new knowledge will help both staff and students as I can better assist each of them in understanding both their rights and the duties and responsibilities of the school.

Essay 2: Personnel Management

Respond to the questions in the red box. Your essay should:

- Use citations from the research when applicable.
- Use professional writing protocols.
- Use professional language.

- What have you learned about teacher evaluation and remediation that you did not know before taking this class?
- How will the information presented in this course help you become a better manager of your school employees?
- What aspect of school personnel management do you feel you need to learn more about?
- How do you plan to gain this knowledge?

Type your essay in the space below.

I have learned that teacher evaluation and remediation is affected by the property rights of the teacher in their contract; if you have a teacher who is low-performing but not doing something of a nature that would endanger or harm students, it is much better to let their contract expire and non-renew than it is to get rid of them in the middle of their contract term. I also learned that a teacher cannot be on a probationary contract for more than three years; after that time the district must either offer the teacher a term contract or dismiss them.

I will be a better manager of my staff in the school because I learned that they have a property right in their contract; I knew a contract was a legal document, but did not think of it as their property. This gives me more insight into the due process proceedings, and why it is so difficult to terminate a teacher or staff member in the middle of a term contract. I will also be more critically evaluative of contracted staff during a probationary contract term, to be sure that if they are low-performing they do not get an "easy ride" into a term contract where it would be much more difficult to terminate them later.

I learned that, contrary to what I had traditionally heard, "at-will" employees cannot be terminated "at any time for any reason, or for no reason"; instead, I need to have just enough documentation of performance concerns to convince a judge or jury that I did not terminate an employee because of a discriminatory reason. I need to learn more about the at-will employee documentation aspect of school personnel management in my District, and I plan to gain this knowledge by utilizing the resources of my human resources department and my Superintendent now that I have a better understanding of what questions to ask them regarding both best practices and our District policies.

Essay 3: Improving Professional Practice

Respond to the questions in the red box. Your essay should:

Use citations from the research when applicable.

Use professional writing protocols.

Use professional language.

- Select another legal topic covered in this course that you feel affects you as a school leader.
- What have you learned about this topic, and how will this new knowledge affect your decision-making as an administrator?
- What professional development opportunities can you spearhead in your school to inform teachers about this issue?

Type your essay in the space below.

Another legal topic covered in this course that affects me as a school leader is the Special Education law we covered. The in-depth knowledge I gained about the Individualized Education Plan (IEP) implementation process in the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) will allow me to better assist teachers as we implement assistive technology devices required in student IEPs, or look for ways to utilize technology to better implement general IEP classroom modifications. Learning the inner workings of the Admission, Review, and Dismissal (ARD) process helps me better understand the struggles that both our staff and the parents of these children face as they work through the best way to assist a student to progress academically.

I had always thought that the school had to do pretty much whatever it takes to help these students excel, but in the section on Free and Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) I learned through *Board of Education v. Rowley* case law that a school is only required to provide services that allow Special Education students to progress academically, not services that maximize their potential. I also realized that our Special Education staff and the school nursing staff have much more to do for these students than just educating them as *Irving Independent School District v. Tatro* defined that any service that does not require a medical doctor to be performed must be provided by the school.

As a result of this course, I plan to work with our Special Education director to find ways to use technology to better inform all our teachers of their duties and obligations under the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) and No Child Left Behind (NCLB). I especially believe that the professional development plan that I created during our previous homework assignment, which was based on Special Education staff interviews and the content and resources of this course, could be easily implemented as an on-demand web-based professional development activity that all teachers, substitutes and administrators could access, and have hopes to implement this in some fashion during the coming school year.